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Conversations with Walt Whitman

BY

 SADAKICHI

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English

Dedicated to

ARTIST THOMAS EAKINS,
OF PHILADELPHIA,

as an Admirer of

WALT WHITMAN,

in his own Native Independence, Simplicity and Force,

without Crankiness and

Subserviency.

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CONVERSATIONS WITH WALT WHITMAN.

DURING my Philadelphia student days I discovered in the parlor of my relatives—plebeian, philistine grand uncle and aunt of mine; peace be with their souls!—a volume of poetry, I believe, the only one in the house and not remarkable at that, which lay there lonesome as if in state. It had been presented to them by their daughter, who had made a good match by marrying lumber, and in the eyes of the parents was equipped with all those excellent qualities which a modern American lady should possess. The book was cherished accordingly; now and then the mother's hand glided caressingly over the gold embossed covers, but it was never read. It was an edition of Stoddard's poems. I perused them, recognized their worth, and laid them aside for ever. I did not know that indirectly through them, I should make the acquaintance of the most American intellectual individuality these States have hitherto produced. It came about in the following way.

At that period of life, like Ulrich von Hutten, I was more anxious about my spiritual than bodily welfare, and really abused my body to a shameful degree. I had

given up all regular work in order to study. How I subsisted then as at many subsequent periods, I really cannot tell. I enjoyed the humorous weekly allowance of three dollars, that went largely towards the purchase of second-hand books, for which purpose I rummaged for hours through all the different stores, and of course Ninth Street was also my favorite hunting ground.

On one of these expeditions I entered a little store which hitherto had escaped my invasions. It looked as if it had never been swept, the dust lay a quarter of an inch thick on the shelves. The proprietor, dusty like his books, with a rich layer of dandruff on his back and shoulders, his coat and shirt front spotted with tokens of his meals, was sitting on a box, a cigar clenched in his mouth, and reading very intensely. He was a man of middle age, with quite a fierce interesting physiognomy, and as I soon found out, different to the ordinary book-sellers—also his stock was more select—being the author of several excellent poems.

I soon became a regular frequenter of this place, where amongst others I made the acquaintance of an old, well to do Quaker—dressed in old fashioned drab suit, clerical neckwear, and broad brim, exactly as the Friends had walked about Independence Hall a hundred years before—who played an important part in my drama of life, as he launched me into a more intellectual society than hitherto had been my deplorable fate to associate with.

And all this happened simply because I accidentally mentioned the author of the volume of poetry lying in

state in my relatives' parlor. The dusty bookseller was highly astonished, that I, only a late edition to the conglomeration called Americans, knew Stoddard's poems. A conversation about American literature ensued, he became interested in me, and introduced me to his acquaintances.

We had regular little meetings in this shop, and discussed one literary subject after the other, and during one of these, the dusty bookseller advised me to call on Walt Whitman. "He is living right across the river, in Camden, he likes to see all sorts of people." The Quaker argued that it had always been his intention to go over, but somehow he never got to it, and as he was an old man, I should do it instead. A young Jewish lawyer present remarked with triumphant glee that he has crossed the ferry with Whitman sitting at his side.

So I decided to go.

MY FIRST VISIT.

IT was in November, 1884, that I paid my first visit to Walt Whitman.

After crossing the Delaware—in my excitement to get there I took the wrong ferry, which lands the passengers a few blocks higher up the river than the other—I asked a policeman if he knew where Whitman resided. "Of course, I know—" he directed me: "—and then you see a little two story frame house, grey, that's the place."

Arrived in Mickle Street, one of the most quiet and humble in provincial Camden, I easily found number 328 and rang the bell.

It was a disagreeable day, snow was lying on the ground, and though it was thawing, the wind felt cold as it sped through the streets and rattled at the shutters.

An old man with a long grey beard, flowing over his open shirt front—the first thing I actually saw of Whitman was his naked breast—half opened the door and looked out.

SADAKICHI: "I would like to see Walt Whitman."

WHITMAN: "That's my name. And you are a Japanese boy, are you not?" (Except very small boys the only person I met in those years who recognized my nationality at the first glance.)

SADAKICHI: "My father is a German, but my mother was a Japanese and I was born in Japan."

WHITMAN: "H'm—Come in."

And he led me into the small and humble two windowed little parlor, with its chilly atmosphere, as no fire was lit, and everything in great disorder. The first color impression of the interior, was a frugal grey. He sat down at the right window, where he was generally to be seen, with his face turned towards the street. Visitors seated themselves at the opposite side. Between the host and guest stood a table, actually covered with books, magazines, newspaper clippings, letters, manuscripts. A demijohn, which looked very suspicious to me until I was better informed, occupied a conspicuous place on the table, and during the

summer a glass with flowers, brought by some lady friend, was always within his reach. The rest of the room looked very much like the table; a varitable sea of newspapers, books, magazines, circulars, rejected manuscripts, etc., covered the floor in a topsyturvy fashion, and only here and there odd pieces of furniture, a trunk, a large heap of his own publications loomed up like rocks. On the mantelpiece stood an old clock, surrounded by photographs of celebrities and friends, on my first visit also a few apples and onions were lying there. On one side of the mantelpiece hung the portrait of his father, on the other side that of his mother: two strong, highly interesting physiognomies. As I studied them one day, he remarked: "I never forget that my ancestors were Dutch."

There was nothing overwhelming to me in Whitman's face, but I liked it at once for its healthy manliness. It seemed to me a spiritually deepened image of contemporary Americans: an ideal laborer, as the Americans are really a nation of laborers. Above all else I was attracted by the free flow of his grey hair and beard, and his rosy complexion, Boucher like, only healthier and firmer in tone. Of his features the large distance between his heavy eyebrows and his bluish grey eyes, (calm and cold in their expression) denoting frankness, boldness, haughtiness, according to my physiognomical observations, particularly interested me. His forehead was broad and massive, not furrowed by Kantean meditation, but rather vaulted by spontaneous *prophecies* (in the sense in which Whitman applies this word to

Carlyle, viz: II 169.)* His broad nose with dilated nostrils showed with what joy of living he had inhaled life.

He was dressed as usual in a grey suit, and negligé shirt with a broad turnover collar. I was too much impressed by the passive power of his personality, and occupied in studying his appearance and the *milieu* in which he lived to be able to remember much of this first conversation.

At that time I was stage-struck, and of course mentioned my intention to devote myself to the histrionic art; I contemplated a special study of Shakespeare's fools (though I was rather too tall for them, they should be played by Marshall Wilders.)

WHITMAN: (shaking his head): "I fear that won't go. There are so many traits, characteristics, Americanisms, inborn with us, which you would never get at. One can do a great deal of propping. After all one can't grow roses on a peach tree."

I spoke of Japan, of the beautiful bay of Nagasaki though I did not know much about it from personal recollection.

WHITMAN: "Yes, it must be beautiful."

On leaving he gave me a proof sheet copy of "After all Not to Create Only," saying paternally: "Read it over six or eight times and you may understand it."

"Come again, come again!" he shouted after me.

*Volume and page quotations from the 1891-'2 edition, David McKay, publisher, 23 South Ninth Street, Philadelphia, Pa., recommended by Whitman as the most complete and satisfactory.

VISITS DURING 1886, MARCH—OCTOBER.

ONE of my first visits, after I had returned to Philadelphia from my first European trip, was to the "good grey poet." I told him about my studies, my stay in Hamburg, Berlin and principally Munich, where I had enjoyed a delightful series of conversation with Paul Heyse, the foremost living author of Germany ; also that I had written an article "Ein Besuch bei Walt Whitman" for the "*Münchner Nueste Nachrichten*" in which I had made some comparison of his works with the old Greek literature, a comparison I was rather ashamed of.

I felt relieved, however, when he remarked : "The Greek nation was the most remarkable one after all."

Speaking of Germany, he observed with paternal good-will, "The old countries have also their destiny—there is no such thing as decay."

I purchased from him two copies of the 1882 McKay edition of his literary work.

"One is for you?" he asked, "I let you have it for half price."

"Do you sell many?" I inquired.

"Very few, very few," and he shook his head, "I believe not more than two hundred a year," he added with slight mockery.

Whitman was always very fond of speaking of his literary achievements, and remarked on various occasions :

"There is a certain idea in my works—to glorify industry, nature, and pure instinct."

After commenting on Browning. "If anything has a destiny, the English language has a destiny. In my books, in my prose as well as my poetry are many knots to untie."

"Leaves of Grass are the reflections of American life and ideas which reflect again."

Leaves of Grass! How adequate a title! Truly his poems are chaotic in appearance like clusters of wild grass. As we loll amongst them, looking from blade to blade, they seem to us so prosaic, and yet so rythmical in their hieroglyphic simplicity and munificent utility. And considering them from some distance we observe with what masterhand these spears are grouped together, as if Gothic Dürer had outlined them, as if we were gazing into the forest-like halls of nature's cathedral.

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As my hesitancy at calling too often had been allayed once for all by his cheerful "Come again, come again!" only a short time elapsed before I was again wending my way to Camden. I read to him a little treatise on beauty, my first original literary effort in English that I had flogged out of my brain with considerable exertion during an afternoon in Fairmount Park.

I read a sentence that sounded very much like Millet's: "All is proper to be expressed, provided one's aim is only high enough," and which he quotes as a motto (II, 302).

"Where did you get that from?" he started up, most eagerly.

I explained, and continued to read; when I had finished I asked: "Well, what is your opinion about it?"

There was a pause, as if he wanted to indicate that my writing did not call forth any opinion in him, then he said leisurely: "They are truisms—I am no worshipper of beauty. I do not believe in abstract beauty."

At that time I did not exactly know what he meant by abstract beauty, so I merely nodded and uttered a long drawn 'Ye-es' with a knowing air.

As I was leaving, he pointed towards a bunch of red carnations that were standing in a glass before him.

"Take a pink!"

I took one, pressed it among my "Leaves of Grass," and have kept it ever since.

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Many of his visitors have complained that Whitman was unbearably selfish in his social intercourse. Of course they gave in, that they could walk straight into his parlor, shake hands with him, and sit down whenever they liked, but right there all privileges ceased, as it was simply impossible to make him speak, and after a few vain endeavors, shy at first and then more or less indignant, they had to give it up as a hopeless task. True enough, Whitman had a peculiar habit of being absent-minded in company, especially that of strangers—which Dr. Max Nordau considers one of the strongest proofs of Whitman's moral insanity—and to the despair of uninitiated visitors he answered all their questions with his favorite ejaculation: oy! oy? or oy!? This peculiarity excited the ire of many visitors, and with right, as some had come all the way from England and were full of expectancy about the harvest they were to

reap of wise oracular utterances—but why should a man always feel like talking, at any time of the day, with any person who might have taken it into his head to call, often out of sheer curiosity or egotistical purpose! I personally found him sociable enough. At times I also found it extremely difficult to induce him to take an actual active part in a conversation, and do something else but listen and ejaculate, but I generally found a successful remedy in simply talking on, jumping from one subject to the other, until finally he became interested in one thing or another, and when he had once begun, it was comparatively easy to proceed. On several exceptional occasions we talked for two or three hours without interruption, which clearly revealed to me, however, that he had no remarkable conversational power. He was no Johnson, no ready wit, or speculative monologist, had nothing whatever of the fluent delivery of learned men, or of the French *causeur littéraire*. He was always awkward in his utterances, often clipping verbs and conjunctions, making abrupt halts, leaving sentences unfinished—in short applying somewhat the style of his shorter poems—which really made it laborious to get anything of literary value from his conversation.

AN IMPORTANT VISIT.

"I have read your books right through" I exclaimed beamingly as I entered.

"Oy! oy?—"Did you make anything out of it?"

I then told him the various impressions his writings had made upon me, and finally asked: "Do you believe that mankind can be improved by books?"

WHITMAN: "I can hardly say that I had the idea to better mankind. I grew up like a tree—the poems are the fruit. Good literature ought to be the Roman cement; the older it grows—the better it serves its purpose."

An old peddler passed by. Whitman waved his hand, his famous *Salut au Monde*, as he did to nearly every passer-by.

The ragged old man stopped before the window and displayed his ware.

Whitman greeted him with a cordial "How do you do, sir?" and leaning a little out the window pointed at a set of collar buttons: "How much are they?"

PEDDLER: (holding them up to him) "Five cents."

WHITMAN: "No, thanks, I don't need any to-day."

Then followed an awkward pause.

I produced the copy of "After all Not to Create Only" with which he had presented me, handsomely bound.

"Why how nice it looks!" he exclaimed, scrutinizing it from all sides.

"Wont you inscribe something in it?" I asked.

"Thanks" he answered, and holding the book on his knee, his habitual way of writing, he penned down the

words, 'Given to C. S. H., by Walt Whitman' in his immense, uncouth, heavy-stroked handwriting, which offers marvelous opportunities to chirographists.

After this performance another pause, and a few vain attempts on my side to get him interested in some topic.

I mentioned at haphazard that my old Quaker friend had been one of his very first admirers, having studied the 1856 edition.

"Why I must go to see him," he exclaimed enthusiastically "yes, that's what I am going to do!" He never did, but we talked for a while quite seriously about how it could be accomplished without exerting him.

"I want you to do me a favor—" and Whitman suddenly rose, dragging himself slowly step by step, with the help of a stick in a sideward direction through the room and upstairs. I looked after him for an explanation, but as none came, glanced over some books on the table, and was attracted by an old voluminous edition of Walter Scott's poems with numerous margin notes in red ink. He returned with a clipping of a German newspaper, handed it to me, and asked me to translate it. It was an ordinary newspaper concoction on "Leaves of Grass," comparing his style with that of the psalmists.

Whitman smiled: "I don't know why some men compare my book with the Bible."

Another pause ensued.

For at least half an hour I spoke of a dozen different subjects or more, without getting anything else but an occasional oy! oy? as answer, nevertheless, one could

presume from the way Whitman poised his head, that he was listening quite attentively most of the time.

At last I broke this silence by mentioning that I had read Bryant's "Thanatopsis." "There is something large about it," I remarked.

WHITMAN: "He is our greatest poet. He had a smack of Americanism, American individuality, smack of outdoor life, the wash of the sea, the mountains, forests, and animals. But he is too melancholy for a great representative of American poetry."

SADAKICHI: "It seems that the New England States have produced nine tenths of all our American literati (a word I had learnt from Whitman, which he used with preference instead of authors, poets etc). I cannot understand the worship of Emerson. Many of his ideas one can find in the Alexandrian philosophers."

WHITMAN: "Emerson's deficiency is that he doubts everything. He is a deep thinker, though he had hardly any influence on me; but people say so; maybe, without my knowledge. He had much of the Persians and Oriental people. He is only the offspring of other suns tumbling through the universe."

For a moment I thought of Whitman and Emerson, arguing under the old elms of Boston Common about certain passages in the "Children of Adam" and Whitman, after listening for two hours to the well nigh indisputable logic of Emerson, being "more settled than ever to adhere to his own theory." (American genre painters should tackle that subject!)

WHITMAN: "Did you read Holmes?"

SADAKICHI: Very little. He serves his humor in a dainty fashion; yet I cannot digest it, it is too dry for me."

WHITMAN: "He is very witty, very smart, not first rank and not second rank; man of fine culture, who knows how to move in society; he takes the same place in modern society as the court singers and troubadours in the Middle Ages, who had a taste for castles, ladies, festivals, etc., who knew exactly how to move among kings and princes; but something was failing, that very thing which would have made him a poet."

His opinion about Mark Twain was similar.

SADAKICHI: "It seems to me, as if all these men produced nothing new. They are like imitators, for instance, was Washington Irving anything but a clever English essayist?"

WHITMAN: "Some people think they are poets if they have a feeling for jewels, paste gems, feathers, birds, flowers, perfume, etc. In a barbaric country among uncivilized people they would deserve some praise, but not in our time, when everybody can imagine these things."

SADAKICHI: "Like Gilder and Stoddard?"

WHITMAN: "Who?"

SADAKICHI: "Stoddard, for instance?"

WHITMAN: "Stoddard is fair, but many are like him."

SADAKICHI: "Whittier seems to reflect more of the *milieu* of his creed and country?"

WHITMAN: "Whittier was a strong poet, the favorite of Horace Greeley—as good and powerful in his old days as in his young. Much earnestness and fierceness bends all his Quaker peace."

SADAKICHI: "And the critical element, is it entirely lacking? Whipple? (I shrugged my shoulders) Lowell, of course."

WHITMAN: (nodded) "Cute, elegant, well dressed, somewhat of a Yankee—student—college."

SADAKICHI: "I think Stedman is after all the best we have."

WHITMAN: "Oy? (pause—smiling) Stedman is, after all, nothing but a sophisticated dancing master. If Hercules or Apollo himself would make their appearance he would look at them only from the standpoint of a dancing master. Now I have to be excused. I feel tired."

So I shook hands with him, and left satisfied with that afternoon's conversation at any rate.

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During this as well as the following visits, I made it my object to practice Boswellian tactics, I generally prepared my questions beforehand. Sitting opposite him, I never let any words of importance escape from his lips without repeating them several times rapidly to myself, and as soon as I was on the ferry I jotted them down on scraps of paper, word by word.

These estimates of contemporary American authors aroused quite a storm of indignation when I published them in the *New York Herald* in 1889, which was the

more strange as Whitman made similar statements in his writings, for instance on Longfellow (II, 481). Mr. Th. B. Harned, of Camden, even went as far as to write to me, after I had published them once more in the *Boston Weekly Review* in '93:

"I have been shown in the *Review* your article containing alleged sayings of Walt Whitman respecting certain authors. It is not fair to reprint this after Whitman's death. This article caused considerable trouble when it was first published. Walt repudiated the whole article and told me that you manufactured it. You make him call Stedman a 'sophisticated dancing master' and this caused no end of mischief. Walt has the greatest possible regard for Stedman and there was a strong attachment between these two men. Walt assured Stedman at that time that you had coined the expression out of your own unaided imagination."

To this I can only reply, that Walt Whitman has said every word that I attribute to him, and that I feel obliged to leave various utterances of interest, for instance on Howells, etc., unpublished because I am not quite certain whether the wording, as I have it, is absolutely correct. What object had I in coining these critical remarks! And as far as Whitman's repudiation is concerned, I simply do not believe in it. The Whitman, I knew, never repudiated. I saw Whitman quite often after the publication of the *Herald* article, and he never mentioned a word to me about it. And could Whitman and Stedman not frankly express opinions about each other, and yet entertain a strong attachment? From the

conventional point of view Stedman's comments on Walt (which are quoted later on ; to me the most reasonable criticism ever made on certain traits of Whitman's open and yet so complex character) were just as straightforward. Besides what did Whitman mean by calling Stedman 'a sophisticated dancing master' but that all critics—and Stedman is our best critic of the old school—are sophisticated dancing masters in comparison to creative minds, eternity-souls (like Walt Whitman). There is, however, still another point on which the Philistines may attack me most cruelly. What right have I or any person to repeat what so and so remarked about so and so in private conversation ! Was I a malicious scandal-loving tale-bearer, a literary spy in service of sensational journalism ! Indeed I was not. All I received for the publication of these notes was twelve dollars, and that only three years after the conversations had happened. My code of morals simply differs on the point of discretion with that of these people. I believe implicitly that no person should say anything about another, which they would not be willing to repeat or have repeated face to face with the person discussed. To practice this principle—I am convinced that men of the Whitman type share this view—comes absolutely natural to me, and I have acted accordingly (always ingenuously, of course) since childhood, despite the endless inconveniences that have ensued out of it for me.

A LUNCHEON WITH WHITMAN.

We had been talking about politics.

WHITMAN: "It does not matter much who's in Washington. Certainly they must have one—and I think Cleveland tries to do his best."

SADAKICHI: "Then you consider all party contests unnecessary from an ideal point of view?"

WHITMAN: "Americans are allowed to be different. The theory of our government is to give to every man the freedom of his activity—to work, study, electrify."

'Yes in theory,' I thought, 'but not in practise' and wondered at his apparant indifference to present conditions. I soon learnt that Whitman looked at all things from the most cosmic point of view possible.

Then our conversation drifted to Bismarck.

SADAKICHI: "Bismarck refounded the German nation, and Wagner gave to it a national art."

WHITMAN: "Yes, Bismarck's work of life is to make Germany strong. Stanton was very much like him. I excuse a great deal of tyranny, even cruelty in the government of a nation. Stanton was a steady supplement to Lincoln."

Whenever he spoke of Lincoln his voice seemed to assume a tone of reverence. His estimate of the martyr president was almost idolatrous. He considered himself nothing in comparison, and several times in my presence murmured, as if to remind himself: "Lincoln is our greatest man. I sometimes ask myself what

would have become of us if he hadn't been president during those terrible years, 1862-5."

Nothing was more natural than Whitman's love for Lincoln. Lincoln as a man of deed was as true a representative of our American conglomeration and the 'Democratic Vista' of its future, as the literary prophet himself; and as a character-study Lincoln was even more suggestive of grandeur, for as Whitman has written "four sorts of genius, four mighty and primal hands, will be needed to the complete limning of this man's future portrait—the eyes and brains and finger touch of Plutarch and Eschylus and Michael Angelo, assisted by Rabelais."

Who knows if in centuries to come, when so much has clarified that now confuses our view, Lincoln and Whitman will not stand distinct in the mists of the past like Pericles and Phidias.

How sincere and persistent Whitman was in his Lincoln cult everybody knows who has heard him read his Memorial lecture, or 'Captain my captain' with which he generally concluded. His very life blood throbbed in every word, as he slowly proceeded, sentence after sentence, with that noble simplicity which only strong personalities can apply successfully, as their individuality alone is sufficient to satisfy the curiosity of intelligent audiences. I, for my part, shall never forget how he read the simple words, 'the hospitals, oh, the hospitals.' The 'Paradox on the Comedian' could never produce such an effect.

SADAKICHI: "What is your estimate of Washington?"

WHITMAN (in an almost humorous tone): "George Washington had the power of organization, the ability to indentify the power of the States. He was an Englishman, an English Franklin—wealthy—well educated—with high morals."

Then Billie, a railroad newsboy, who boarded with Whitman's housekeeper, Mrs. Davis, came bouncing in, kissed Whitman repeatedly and asked whether luncheon was ready.

Whitman (rising) "Mrs. Davis is out, but we'll manage to get something. Come on, Mr. Sadakichi."

We sojourned into the kitchen. Billie was sent out to get a can of lobster, and there was quite a dispute between the two as to what kind they wanted, one being a few cents more expensive.

Then Whitman set the table, and I assisted him.

WHITMAN (limping to the range and frying several eggs): "The American nation is not much at present, but will be some day the most glorious one on earth. At first the cooking must be done, the table set, before one can sit down to a square meal. We are now tuning the instruments, afterwards comes the music."

Then he brought out some California claret, and when Billie returned with the lobster, we sat down—several hens running in and out the half open door through which one could catch a glance of the red and green of a sunlit yard—and had a very jolly repast.

Whitman was in the best of humor and ate heartily.

WHITMAN: "Have you been West?"

SADAKICHI: "No—but I have a brother in Denver, who has written to me about his adventures out there."

WHITMAN (enthusiastically): "In Denver I would like to live!" and he began to relate his Denver impressions, of the smelting works, etc., several sentences with an astonishing similarity to those in his *Specimen Days* (II, 146).

Whitman always succeeded in putting the most vital essence of things into his rhapsodical writings, and his conversation on the same topics, even after years, could be nothing else but repetitions of what he had already expressed in the jagged structures of his poetry or prose.

The restless commercial activity of the Americans, our strongest social trait, is not favorable to the cultivation of an independent spiritual life. Even in the acquirements of educational mediums the same haste is applied, as if Stanford universities and metropolitan art schools could produce culture.

The reticent inward growth in artistic domains was therefore rendered extremely difficult, and, though Whitman was a creative genius of the first magnitude, he lacked the constructive ability of great European minds.

We had nearly finished when Whitman remarked: "In New York, Boston, the East, they eat their bread and beef and digest it for the Western world, but in the valley of the Mississippi there is quite another life."

After we had returned into the front room, Billie came and fondled around him, asking if we could not

have a drink of whiskey, he would go upstairs and get it.

WHITMAN : "Not to day ! Not to day !" (and took a drink of the demijohn on the table.)

SADAKICHI : "What is that ?"

WHITMAN : "Spring water."

When the boy saw that his begging was useless he kissed Whitman several times, and left.

ANOTHER LITERARY AFTERNOON.

SADAKICHI : "Sidney Lanier, weak as he is, seems to me after all our most modern poet."

WHITMAN : "Oy ! oy ?"

SADAKICHI : "At any rate, though only a flute player, he is more powerful than Dempster Sherman, Bliss Carman, or Paul Hayne."

WHITMAN : "Who ! Paul Hayne ? I don't know much about him ; quite a poet, I presume, genteel, etc., nothing dazzling."

SADAKICHI : "Strange how America could ever produce such a genius like Poe."

WHITMAN (indifferently) : "Poe had a tendency for the gloomy side of life."

SADAKICHI : "I presume, you have also no special liking for Hawthorne ?"

WHITMAN : "About Hawthorne I have nothing particular to say. The multitude likes him. I have read his novels. In my opinion, they do not amount to much. His works are languid, melancholy, morbid.

He likes to dwell on crimes, on the sufferings of the human heart, which he analyzes by far too much. Our literature will come! The newspapers indicate it, miserable as they are, miserable and grand too as they are."

SADAKICHI: "Do you not think that the present literary shortcomings are due to the spirit of our time?"

WHITMAN: "Our time? We must settle a little more, but there seems to be a demand for this hurly-burly time."

MRS. DAVIS (at the door): "The luncheon is ready."

WHITMAN: "Come, Mr. Sadakichi have a bite."

Once more we sat down at the kitchen table and displayed our strong, healthy appetites. I, at last, had found my peer in eating.

WHITMAN (eating): "Just as we always prefer a dish that our mother cooked—it tastes better than anything else we get in after life—I like those books best, I read when I was young. Everybody who reads novels not for mere pleasure will admire Walter Scott. He had a Shakespearcan variety of subject. He did not analyze and anatomize his subjects."

SADAKICHI: "Which of his novels do you like best?"

WHITMAN: "The Heart of Midlothian. I read it over and over again."

I wanted to know his opinion on Victor Hugo, and spoke of the marvelous description of the battle of Waterloo, but Whitman had no word of admiration.

"I do not like him much."

SADAKICHI: "What do you think about Byron?"

WHITMAN: "Byron became bitter through the ups and downs of his career, his life—specially the downs. A desperate fierceness is predominant in his works. But I like something more free—Homer, Shakespeare, Walter Scott, Emerson."

In the parlor we resumed our review of literature. A few of his remarks were:

"Taine's Literature is one of the productions of our age"

"Rousseau I have never read, of Voltaire now and then a quotation."

"Chinese literature, I think, is empirical."

Probably, to protect himself against draughts, he had wrapped a shawl of an Oriental pattern around his shoulders, and with his white beard streaming over this reddish orange cloth, he looked very much like one of those biblical characters, Rubens and his pupils have painted.

SADAKICHI (rising to leave): "May I kiss you?"

WHITMAN: "Oh, you are very kind."

I touched his forehead with my lips. "Thanks, thanks!" ejaculated Whitman. With a blush of false shame I offered him this tender tribute of youthful ardor, ambition, enthusiasm with which my soul was overflowing; I felt that I had to show to this man some emotional sign of the love, I bore his works or those of any remarkable individuality.

* * * * *

One afternoon I took an acquaintance with me to

photograph his house, the right window with Whitman looking out waving his *Salut au Monde*, and the interior of the parlor.

Sorry to report, the negative of the first was broken, and the other two did not come out well, as the shy young man, who felt rather uncomfortable in the presence of the great man, was not far enough advanced in amateur photography. The first negative, of course, can be replaced at any time, but in regard to the others it is a great pity, for, as far as I know, no such photographs have ever been taken, and even Whitman's own descriptions cannot give us an exact idea of the peculiar atmosphere of his last years' retreat.

Now, everything is changed.

A visit to the humble frame building in Mickle Street hardly repays the trouble at present. The almost historically noted room looks like any other ordinary parlor, as everything of interest has been removed, and some new furniture added instead. Some of Walt Whitman's admirers have privately agreed to buy the house and hand it down to posterity in its present state, making a sort of Whitman museum of it. How stupid these rooms will look, with well swept floors, solemnly adorned with busts and neatly hung with photographs!

Why not try and be original—original in the manner that Walt Whitman would have liked—and give a perfect fac-simile of the room as it was during the lifetime of the poet—the floor strewn with newspapers,

magazines, and books ; on the table a demijohn with spring water ; on the mantelpiece photographs ; on the walls pictures of his parents ; in one corner a large heap of his own books ? It would be the work of an artistic person, who was familiar with Walt Whitman's way of living, to rearrange the room ; but it could be done and would be unique.

* * * *

On one of my visits I was accompanied by Miss E.

Whitman at once shook hands with the young lady, and asked for her name.

After some commonplaces had been exchanged, Whitman got up and said : " I am going out for a drive in a moment. There's the team. Stay here with Mrs. Davis, she will entertain you. Do as if you were at home. (To Miss E.) You must come again. Good bye, good bye ! "

Then we talked commonplaces for a while with Mrs. Davis. I, who was subject to a frightful temper at the time, asked the housekeeper if Whitman were always so calm, of that friendly but stoic nature, if nothing could disturb him.

MRS. DAVIS : " He is always that way. I am now with him for several years."

SADAKICHI : " But does he not even scold ? "

MRS. DAVIS : " Oh, no."

I myself had later on a proof of the truth of this statement. One day he wished to show me an original letter by Stanton. He looked over the various unruly heaps of papers and books, at first in vain, but at last

found it in some book in a rather dilapidated condition, as if somebody had wilfully torn it. He simply gazed at it for a long while, and then exclaimed in a grieved voice: "Why, I would give ten dollars if this was not done!"

IMPERTINENT QUESTIONS.

The next time an autograph collector was on the scene, coaxing Whitman to give him some photographs and sign them.

AUTOGRAPH FIEND: "They will be valuable some day."

WHITMAN (looking up): "What are you doing now?"

SADAKICHI: "I read your 'Pieces in Early Youth,' what do you think of them?"

WHITMAN: "Pretty bad—pretty bad."

SADAKICHI: "I looked every where for your 'Frank Evans,' your novel on metropolitan city life, but no body seems to know anything about it."

WHITMAN: "Oy!?"

AUTOGRAPH FIEND: "Is this gentleman also a writer?"

WHITMAN: "No, Mr. Sadakichi is interested a little in everything."

AUTOGRAPH FIEND (patronizingly): "I believe Mr. Whitman will some day be considered a great author."

I ignored him, and Whitman silently handed him the signed photographs, then the fiend made his exit.

I pointed at some of Whitman's favorite books and asked :

"What will become of all these things, when you die? Surely they are of great value."

I don't know whether he was annoyed at this question, but he responded rather growlingly, "I never think of that."

Did he dislike to talk about death like Johnson, Carlyle and many others?

Then I launched upon a still more impertinent topic, on his relation to women.

WHITMAN (evading the question) : "One cannot say much about women. The best ones study Greek or criticise Browning—they are no women."

SADAKICHI (rather brusquely) : "Have you ever been in love?"

WHITMAN (rather annoyed by my cross examining) : "Sensuality I have done with. I have thrown it out, but it is natural, even a necessity."

I do not believe that Whitman was ever absorbed in a love of the Petrarch or Dante type, he stood most likely between the ideal free lover and the ideal varietist.

To entertain him I had brought with me the photographs of a number of celebrities I had met in Germany. Showing him a photograph of the German actor, Ernst Possart as Napoleon, he ardently exclaimed : "Very fine—very fine!" Of the others Paul Heyse's beautiful Christ-like face interested him most. He looked at it steadily for at least two minutes, and then with an outpouring of his very soul he uttered a long drawn,

"Beautiful—beautiful!" The sound still rings in my ears.

How rugged and true, he appeared in comparison with the European poet who is more polished and beautiful.

I remarked that Paul Heyse had written to me about him, and had compared "his staff rhymes to the sounds of an Æolian harp, and traditional poetry to the music of a well tuned piano," and had also stated that he preferred "flowers and fruit to leaves of grass."

WHITMAN: "Strange!"

WHITMAN (pointing at a bundle of manuscript): "Will you take it to the Express for me? Mr. Kennedy, a gentleman who lives near Boston, has written about me."

SADAKICHI: "Of course.—How is it, satisfactory?"

WHITMAN: "Passable. To write the life of a human being takes many a book, and after all the story is not told."

SADAKICHI: "Shall I pay for it?"

WHITMAN (hesitating a moment): "No—let him pay."

LAST VISIT IN 1886.

SADAKICHI: "I attended the seance of a medium a few nights ago."

WHITMAN: "Oy!"

SADAKICHI: "She told me a few truisms about myself besides a great deal of nonsensical stuff. I believe these mediums are merely clever women who have a motley knowledge of society and life, of physiognomy, and pathognomy, and above all else the gift of the gab, though in rare cases they may be capable of clairvoyance."

WHITMAN (absent minded): "There are so many other miracles in this world just like them, that can't be explained."

This opening brought us to religion.

WHITMAN: "There is no worse devil than man."

SADAKICHI: "But what do you think of churches, where heaven and hell theories are continually expounded?"

WHITMAN: "If the common consent of people think churches a necessity, they ought to be."

Then, referring to an East Indian native who was trying to introduce Brahminism into America, he said in a slow, fault finding tone: "I don't think he is right."

SADAKICHI: "Do you consider the Christian religion superior to others?"

WHITMAN: "No, religions - - -."

SADAKICHI : "I as an artistic nature, always felt drawn towards the Catholic religion. Of course only on account of its picturesqueness and mysticism."

WHITMAN : "Men should do as they please. Nobody has the right to interfere with another man's business, religion, or habits. That's what I have told to Ingersoll."

Referring to church music, Whitman branched off on music in general. He spoke of a German street band that now and then played in the neighborhood, "very well." He was only superficially acquainted with Wagner and the new school.

WHITMAN : "Verdi I think is one of the best musicians; he is a storm with the intention of being a real storm. Mendelssohn is my favorite. I always like to hear him. Music is the only art where we get something."

Painting and sculpture was never mentioned in our conversations; of course Whitman admired Millet, but the fact that he, who was so anxious to leave to posterity a correct description of his personality, never induced a first-class painter or sculptor to portray him, shows that he was not intimate with contemporary art. His figure as well as face were a wonderful subject for the chisel or brush of a great artist. The opportunity is lost, and photographs are all we have.

SADAKICHI : "I am sailing next week."

WHITMAN : "Sailing to Europe, eh? Well, if you meet young men in Germany—artists—poets—tell them that the liberty and equality of which Freiligrath

and other classics sung, have been quacked over enough. Here in America we do the thing they talk of."

SADAKICHI: "Well, I think I must go. Good bye."

WHITMAN: "Good bye, never forget to study the old, grand poets—but do not imitate them. We want something which pays reverence to our time."

* * * * *

During my absence Miss E. visited Whitman, brought him some flowers and a greeting from me. Thereupon he decided to call her Emma. They spoke about me.

MISS E.: "He is studying life in Paris."

WHITMAN: "Studying life, eh! Let him take care, studying human life is like looking at the stars. If you look too close, there is a dazzle."

* * * * *

I never corresponded with Whitman; the only communication I received from him is a postal card acknowledging the receipt of some money for several of his books I had bought. It said, covering the entire card:

"Yours rec'd—With many thanks—Walt Whitman."

1887.

The conversations during the summer of 1886 were really the most interesting I had with Whitman. Already in July, 1887, there was a decided difference in his deportment; old age and bad health were telling on him, he became more taciturn than ever, and it was

principally I who had to make up the large bulk of the conversation.

In the meantime I had become a very close student of his work, produced a number of prose poems in imitation of him, among them a 'To Walt Whitman.' My youthful enthusiasm extended so far as to cause me to starve in order to purchase his works and present them to leading European critics, so that they might write about him; at one period I even thought of becoming his voluntary nurse.

I had pitched my Bohemian tent in Boston, with the intention of re-introducing Whitman into New England. Whitman being rather badly off financially, a collection was made to enable him to keep a horse and buggy. It looked to me very much like charity, and I hoped to remedy it, by founding a Whitman Society which all Whitman admirers would join in order to give him a permanent pension and do away once for all with donations and charitable gifts. Other aims of the Society were to further the propagation of his works in cheap or gratuitous editions, to make the Whitman society a sort of literary club, with the establishment of a library of the master pieces of foreign literature in the original language and a complete Whitman bibliography as main interest.

All this was undoubtedly praiseworthy but as I could invest only \$100 in the scheme, (largely spent for circulars sent all over the globe) and only two Philadelphia gentlemen. Mr. David McKay, Whitman's publisher, and Mr. C. L. Moore, an amateur poet, had

the enthusiasm to pay the initial fee of twelve dollars, the project was never carried out. True enough in my youthful fervor I acted rather undemocratically by electing the officers of the Society myself, which were as follows :

President : D. R. M. Bucke.

Vice-President : W. S. Kennedy.

Director : Your humble servant.

Committee : C. E. Dallin, a sculptor ; Sylvester Baxter, of the *Boston Herald*, F. A. Nichols, literary editor of the *Boston Globe*, Max Elliot (Mrs. A. M. B. Ellis) correspondent of the *Boston Herald*, J. C. Chamberlain, of the *Boston Transcript*.

Honorary Members :

Mme. Th. Bentzon, Paris.

Rudolf Schmidt, Copenhagen.

Enrico Nencione, Firenze.

The only meeting we ever had in the Boston Globe Building, was opened with the witty remark that also the Secession was had begun in such an humble way, and a censure to me that I had elected the officers, like a despot, without even asking their leave. It was proposed by Mr. Sylvester Baxter that all interested in the project should dine together and talk the matter over. Nobody seconded the motion.

Although the enterprise was a failure, I learnt a good deal by it, as I met personally or corresponded with nearly all Whitman admirers here and abroad.

Among others I tried to induce Oliver Wendell

Holmes and John Greenleaf Whittier to join us. The first I saw smirking, sitting near a framed Mona Lisa, in a little back room with a view on the Charles River, and the latter in a long linen ulster in his Danvers home. Holmes said, nervously twitching his lips in various directions, that he would be willing to give his name if Whittier was, and Whittier assured me that he also was willing only that Mr. Holmes would have to say the first word.

How much cowardice there is practiced even by stars of second or third magnitude in evading a simple truthful answer that would settle such a matter at once !

Diplomatic Holmes would not express himself regarding Whitman but continually smirked.

Old Whittier said candidly : "I bear Whitman no ill will. He does what he thinks right. I, however, can not fully appreciate him. Perhaps it is my fault. I have been brought up too differently. They say to the pure everything is pure, yet it grieves me to see the noblest trailing in the dust, and the very lowest put on high."

1887.

I never mentioned the Society to Whitman himself, whom I saw again twice during a visit to Philadelphia, July 1887.

"Ah, Mr. Sadakichi, are you back again?" He greeted me as cordially as ever.

I told him about Mme. Th. Bentzon's article in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* of 1872, which had introduced him into France, as a powerful individuality, though she was partial in preferring his war poems to all others; also that he was known and appreciated among the younger generation of poets, several of them imitating his diction without rhyme and rythm. Gabriel Sarrazin had not written his article as yet. I also showed him several articles about himself that had appeared in the German press and periodicals, none however as comprehensive as Freiligrath's short notice in the *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung* comparing him with Wagner, which is the more marvelous as it was written as early as 1868, when nearly all failed to grasp the meaning of Whitman's literary innovations.

Also from Italy progress could be reported, Enrico Nencione had written a book on American literature giving Whitman and Poe the foremost rank, had commented upon him repeatedly in the *Nuovo Antologia*, and called him in a letter to me "the great humanitarian poet of the new world." Carducci had expressed his admiration, and the Verists of course, found much of interest in him.

That his Democratic Vistas in the Danish translation by Rudolph Schmidt had quite a circulation, and that Schmidt in his correspondence with me had expressed himself on the lines in *Salut au Monde* beginning with "I see the places of the sagas" (I 116) as being the best perhaps ever written on Scandinavia. On ending my report Whitman jovially burst out: "Why you are

my expounder of Leaves of Grass in Europe!" But the next moment he leaned back in his huge yellow polished arm chair, and let his chin drop on his chest as if a thought absorbed all his attention.

Did he feel that the contents of his books by being uncorked and rebottled into other languages and 'Weltanschauungen' evaporated their most intense and individual efflorescence, the aroma of his rugged, sun-burnt American youth (Whitman had really accomplished his mission before he was 40) before foreigners could enjoy them!

SADAKICHI: "Schmidt intends to write a great novel, a consumé of Danish society."

WHITMAN: "He undertakes a great deal."

SADAKICHI: "By the by, Schmidt complained to me in a letter that he had written repeatedly to you about the great sorrow of his life, his wife suffering from some mental disease, but that he had never received a word of sympathy from your great humane soul, as he expressed himself."

WHITMAN: "Pshaw!"

SADAKICHI: "You probably think why should I feel more sympathy for him than others. The world is full of misery. But will you not write to him?"

WHITMAN: "Most likely."

Whitman had not the glance of Indian sadness which in every pain mirrors its own fate, nor the trembling smile which we love in the images of the Greek. He was one of these stoic natures which we find in new countries, who knew how many human

sacrifices have to be made, before even the uncultivated soil will yield the bare necessities of subsistence. In his time he had also suffered for others, for few men have looked so deep into human life, and scarcely anything could happen in this wide world of ours which did not awake "recallé's" in him, but his sympathy had become passive, and had dissolved in that peaceful state of the soul that the Germans call 'Lebensruhe,' which Goethe possessed in such an eminent degree.

The next time we talked of Boston.

SADAKICHI: "Your books are still in the locked shelves."

WHITMAN: "In the locked shelves, are they, isn't it funny!" (smiling good-humoredly.)

SADAKICHI (taking up Carpenter's "Democracy"): "They say his work resembles yours."

WHITMAN (dryly): "Do they say that?"

Talking of his Boston friends and admirers, mentioning one name or another, he asked quite anxiously: "Quite a clever man, isn't he?" or "I hear, quite a man?"

It was a rather unfriendly day, and as he sat there in his grey suit against the dark grey of the dreary street seen through the dusty window panes—he who had been for so many years not only not understood, but even not misunderstood, and who now in his old age still sat there in world-distracted poverty, secluded from the loud gayeties and soothing comforts of human life—the question: "Do you never long for the company of noble, intellectual, genuine women?" was involuntarily uttered by me.

WHITMAN (after a long pause): "Yes, I think old men like me should have a lady to take care of them; just as Montaigne had his Marie."

This was the only time that I saw this stoic bent by a despondent melancholy mood. And then it was but a quickly passing cloud, as he remarked a few minutes later in a cheerful tone: "After all my staunchest friends have been O'Connor, Burroughs, and Rossetti in England."

I could only nod approval. These men were really worthy of his friendship. O'Connor I have never met, but his fervent, eloquent vindication won my sympathy at once. W. M. Rossetti's acquaintance I made during a stay in London. And John Burroughs I paid a visit to during a pedestrian trip along the Hudson, which I must relate as he represented to me just what I imagine a friend of Whitman's should be.

A VISIT TO JOHN BURROUGHS.

When I arrived at his little estate near West Park, over-looking the Hudson, he was picking berries.

"Greetings from Walt Whitman. I called out as I approached him."

He, without looking up, continued picking berries, I joined him in the work.

BURROUGHS (throwing a side glance at me): "How is Whitman?" and a conversation on this topic ensued.

He showed me over the grounds, while we talked chiefly about literature; the particulars of the conver-

sation are entirely obliterated from my memory, I only recall that we passed a critical review on a motley crowd of authors and dwelt for quite a while on Victor Hugo. I liked his clear judgment and sturdy simplicity of deportment.

Then we entered the house—simple but tasteful interiors—when he introduced me to his taciturn wife and little boy ; and we had a luncheon with wine.

After luncheon Burroughs excused himself as he had to go to Poughkeepsie for a few hours. “But you stay right here, act as if you felt perfectly at home ; if you wish to read go into my study, perhaps, you prefer a plunge.”

For a while I glanced over Burroughs’ works in his study, an ideal little place, a one room cottage, covered with bark on the outside, filled with books, and every convenience for writing ; and with a vista on the Hudson through the windows. Later during the afternoon his little son asked me to play with him : we rambled over the ground, climbed into the cherry trees, and had ‘a rattling good time all around.’

After Burroughs’ return, supper was served, by his ever taciturn wife, and soon after I seized my knapsack and staff, ready to pursue my wandering to the Catskills.

He accompanied me to the gate, and cordially shook hands with me: “I am sorry that I can’t accommodate you over night, but we have no servant girl at present. Drop in if you come this way again—and best wishes to Walt.”

And as I strolled along the dusty highway, while the mists of evening wove their veils over the distance, I wondered at the hospitality of this man to a perfect stranger, for he had not even asked me for my name.

1888.

Next time I saw Whitman was in May 1888, a few days before my departure for England.

SADAKICHI: "Have you done anything with your "November Boughs"?"

WHITMAN: "Here they are!" (pointing down at a bundle of ragged manuscripts, tied together, which he used as a footrest.)

SADAKICHI: "Would you present me with a piece of original manuscript?"

WHITMAN (without answering, got up, untied a bundle of manuscript and handed me "Roaming in Thought" (I 216) written on the back of a creditor's letter): "This will do."

SADAKICHI: "What do you think about St. Gaudens' Lincoln?"

WHITMAN: "— — I really don't know what I think about it."

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Whitman like most of our American writers was not well posted on foreign literature, in particular on foreign contemporary literature. Nietzsche, Ibsen, the Verists, the Symbolists, etc. etc. he had not heard of or they had made no impression on him.

SADAKICHI : "You read Tolstoi?"

WHITMAN : "Not much. In translation—I don't think he has written anything more powerful than his *King Lear of the Steppes*. It has some of the quality of *King Lear*, not merely a resemblance to the plot. I read *War and Peace*. I couldn't make much out of it. The translation seems to be very superficial, poor.—A good book should be like Roman cement, the older it grows, the better it sticks."

* * * * *

SADAKICHI : "Could you give me an introduction to Tennyson?"

WHITMAN : "Rather not. Some time ago I sent several ladies to him, and they had a royal time out of it."

SADAKICHI : "Would you not do the same for me?"

WHITMAN : "Rather not. He is getting old and is bothered too much. Go and see young Gilchrist."

Then we talked about Mrs. Gilchrist, the author of a "*Woman's Estimate of Whitman*."

SADAKICHI : "She was one of your very best friends, was she not?"

WHITMAN : "Yes, she was very much to me," and his voice trembled, the only time that I felt something like tears in his voice.

WHITMAN (as I departed): "Tell my English friends that I feel well—and many thanks to them—that I live very economically, but you don't know what support I get from my friends; besides I write for the magazines and get well paid. The state of my affairs

is at present very bright. Why should I trouble myself, I have only a few years to live."

A MEETING WITH E. C. STEDMAN.

I did not see Whitman again before September, 1889. My feelings towards him had somewhat changed, as I was developing into a writer myself; I feared that Whitman might have too strong an influence upon me, and I had freely given away the various scraps, proof sheets, pictures of him, etc., he had given me, and even disposed of his books, in order not to read them any more.

I do not remember anything Whitman said at this particular visit as I did not take any notes. I recall, however, that I related to him my meeting with E. C. Stedman:

When I called one evening at Mr. Stedman's he had visitors, but he asked me to stay and made me wait over two hours. At last he appeared and addressed me: "I do not know anything about you except that you look like a gentleman."

I introduced myself as the young fanatic of the Walt Whitman Society notoriety.

STEDMAN: "I hope you are not one of those Whitmaniacs?"

I denied the insinuation.

STEDMAN (with fervor): "I have no patience with them at all. I mean those men who say Whitman's

books are their Bible, who must always carry a copy of Leaves of Grass about their person, and put it under their pillows when they go to sleep. They are absolutely disgusting to me and I have told them so."

SADAKICHI: "Yes, you are right I have never in my life met a more narrowminded set of philistines than these Whitman worshippers. How they crouch on their knees before him and whine silly admirations in praise of him, whom they do not comprehend in the least, for there is really not a spark of Whitman's grandeur in any of them. A true Whitmanite would try to be like Whitman in character and action; independent, not looking up to him as to a God."

STEDMAN: "It is a good deal the fault of Whitman himself. He always liked to see himself worshipped, and he is not grateful at all after one does it."

SADAKICHI: "You knew Whitman well?"

STEDMAN: "Oh my, yes, we have often been together, talked and drank beer together. In those days he paraded on Broadway, with a red shirt on, open in front to show the 'scented herbage of his breast' and compared himself with Christ and Osiris. That is absurd!"

SADAKICHI: "Do you think he affected it?"

STEDMAN: "I do. Now it is quite different; sitting there in his grey suit in Camden, quite gentlemanlike. I was always one of his admirers; of course, I object to his 'smell of the armpits,' and that sort of a thing, but I always defended him. Mrs. Ellen McKay Hutchinson, my co-operator, in compiling "The

Library of American Literature" would give him no place at all. But no, I said, that cannot be, in a hundred years people will think a good deal more about him than now. He will grow."

Yes, Mr. Stedman and Co., with all due respect, Whitman will grow. We poor critics can not fell this mighty tree, whose foliage is destined to overshadow these states and, perhaps, the entire world.

Poe was a genius that could have lived in any country. All the other authors did not express America as an entity, but only parts of it, like Hawthorne, Whittier, Thoreau, Bret Hart, Cable, Wilkins, etc. Walt Whitman, however, dragged the ever evolutionizing civilization of these States as far as his own development went, which is typical for the ideal American spirit of to-day, free from foreign idolatry. It is as if the murmuring of a multitude of people were moving through his *Leaves of Grass*. And should the Americans ever become a patriotic democratic race, how much national enthusiasm and pride will jubilate in return around his memory.

1890.

June 1890 brought me once more to Philadelphia. He had already permanently retired to the rooms on the second floor.

He spoke but little. Asking him for his health he answered. "Oh, I am well taken care of, I eat plenty of berries and milk."

After a long pause, he suddenly asked me. "Did you ever meet Ingersoll? You should meet him. He is really a fine fellow."

The rest of this call's conversation consisted almost entirely of questions on my part, and extremely brief answers in the affirmative or negative.

I mentioned the German translation of Leaves of Grass "Grasshalme," by Karl Knortz and T. W. Rolleston, published in Zurich, 1889.

WHITMAN: "Is it—good?"

SADAKICHI: "Yes the selections make a good impression."

WHITMAN: "That's all what non-Americans can expect."

FINALE.

In March 1891 I took my wife to see him. He was very ill. Contrary to the easy access I generally had, Mrs. Davis had to go up stairs first and ask him, if he could see me. "Yes, for a moment."

So we went up stairs. All his former buoyancy seem to have left him, he was really a very old man.

"This is my wife, Mr. Whitman." "Oy! oy!" he exclaimed, "be seated madam."

I asked about his health, if he was still writing a line now an then.

WHITMAN: "Yes, I keep it up to the last, but it is now good bye to my fancy."

I entertained him with the report of the progress his works were making, spoke again of Nencione.

He was very eager to get his address.

We were hardly seated for five minutes when a meal was brought in on a tray: coffee, meat, bread and butter, fruit and pie.

SADAKICHI: "Well, we had better go. I hope you will soon feel better."

WHITMAN: "It is clouded now, possibly, it 'll pass by."

These were the last words Walt Whitman spoke to me.

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When the report of his death reached me, I was in New York. I felt very much like running over to Camden and speaking a few words at the funeral, but as my means were very limited at the time, and as my presence was really unnecessary where so many had to pay their tribute of condolence, I went into Central Park instead, and held a silent communion with the *soul atoms* of the good gray poet, of which a few seemed to have wafted to me on the mild March winds.

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This memorandum has come to an end. Intentionally I abstained from all analytical criticism of his works, and psycho-physiological investigation into his character.

My old Quaker friend once humorously remarked that some day I might be able to publish something like Erckmann—Chatriens "Gespraeche with Goethe." Of course this pamphlet has no such pretentious aim. I

merely wished to relate my personal relation with Walt Whitman, truthfully and without embellishment, and by so doing, to give as faithful a picture as can be given of the living Walt Whitman, slowly ebbing in the sands of seventy, when at last the storm of derision had ceased, and his fame was flaming up all over the world.

Whitman's estimate of me, I presume was less favorable than one might imagine from my intimacy with him. I was a mere lad of nineteen when we had the most striking conversations, and though I was a much more brilliant and less phlegmatic conversationalist than now, our relation was after all very much like that of a disciple to his master. Besides my independent, despotic nature, which never flatters, must have annoyed him at times, for instance when I remarked that the writings of his old age would not add a particle to the glory of the work of his manhood, or that other poets would rise and treat him as he has treated the past.

He had arrived at that point of life when even eternity souls become steady. There is a boundary line, in particular for prophets and innovators, beyond which they search no longer for new realms, but stop to rotate around themselves. In short it is that period in a great man's life, when he has acquired his indisputable and greatest, more or less universal reputation ; for when such a mighty spirit stops to proceed, his few apostles can also stop on the laborious march and take a rest, and the stragglers will approach in a medley crowd and no longer consider themselves stragglers.

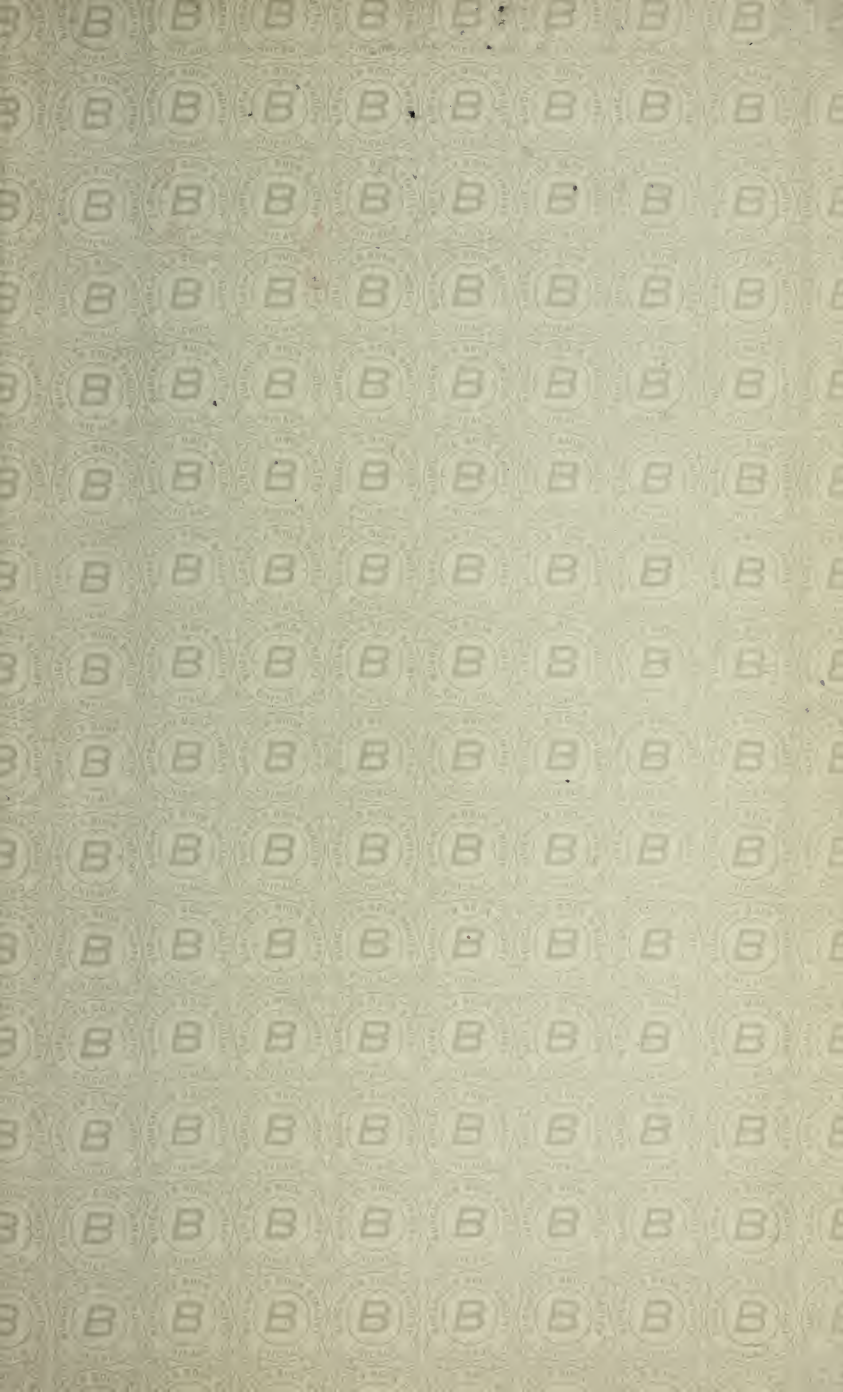
Criticism, abuse, calumnation which persecute each growing greatness, grow silent; all come to shake hands with him and laud him to the skies. And the great man gazes around and is astonished that he has got so far, and he feels religious, and mild, and forgiving towards all—except those who disturb the peace, those who want to proceed. For he who has been a leader, wants to remain a leader.

Nevertheless, what the old Quaker, shortly before his death, remarked about his intercourse with me, I could repeat in regard to Walt Whitman. "When I summon up all the incidents of our acquaintance, it was perfectly satisfactory in every way." I would only add 'the most satisfactory one I ever had, without exception.'

It was calm, invigorating, softly flowing on like a summer day in the open fields or on the ocean.







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